

## IN CONFIDENCE

By HERBERT A. MORRIS

When Margaret Ridley and Eustace Conroy were first married, I thought them both the most fortunate beings in the world.

He was the young hero of the story books to look at, and she was fairer than a flower. It was a union of mature minds, and there was money on both sides; prospect, therefore, of more bliss and success in life than follows the popping of average champagne corks.

As a friend of both families, I received the confidences of both from time to time.

"You are an old fogey, Cousin Arthur," Margaret would say. "I can tell you anything. In confidence, of course. Strictly between you and me."

Qualified or not for the diploma of Old Fogeyism, what man ever seriously objected to receive the confidences of a pretty woman?

As a matter of fact, I rather liked the idea. Whenever she wove the fabric of a hint, I always asked to see the embroidery.

Eustace, on the other hand, was a hundred degrees more nervous. It was seldom, "I want to know this or that," or "I want to tell you such-and-such a matter." He talked of himself in the third person and in the conditional mood—

"If a man were wilfully to rake up something in the past, when he could easily let it slip, and live as though it had never happened, what would you call him?"

"A fool," said I.

Somehow this failed to give pleasure.

"Of course, old man, I was putting a purely hypothetical case. This time your judgment strikes me as a trifle crude. No offense! You know, I rate your opinions tremendously high, as a rule."

"Well," I vouched, looking straight at him, "they're honest, at any rate. Face to face with the fool himself, I should give the same answer."

Next day came Margaret. She looked tired, I thought.

"Oh, the slightest bit," she admitted. "You know what a rush London is. I never did pretend to be robust. One would need to be of strong metal to stand it."

"No doubt, the ladies of the Iron Age had the best of it."

"Why, you exalt the dead above the living!"

"But I don't like to see you jaded," I remonstrated. "That air doesn't suit you. When I look back to your wedding day—let me see, how long ago was that? Three years this week."

"Fancy your remembering!"

"One always notes the critical times in the lives of one's friends."

"Critical?"

"The end of the third year is a very dangerous stage."

Margaret sighed.

"How about those confidences?" I inquired.

"Oh, Cousin Arthur, if I only had some one else to lean on!"

"Your father—"

"Father!" She bit her lips and frowned. "Mother is worse."

"Well, after all," I ventured lightly, "they do belong to the older generation. I'm yours, you know, in spite of the gray hair. We're more on a level."

"It's a woman!" Margaret said suddenly.

"Of course."

"Don't laugh!"

"But one must," I explained gently. "At this stage one positively must. It is much too early for tears."

"Cousin Arthur, were you never in love?"

"That," said I, gravely, "is quite another story. Perhaps you shall hear it some day. In confidence, you know. Strictly between you and me."

"Oh," she said, flushing. "I was—I am—in love with Eustace! This trouble is not ten days old, but it seems a lifetime."

"The signs?" I inquired.

"I should never dream of prying. Cousin Arthur, but there are—letters."

"Yes?"

"Which he destroys unread."

"Hopeful."

"Some day I feel sure he will open them."

"Your pessimism shocks me."

"He is different toward me when he has received one."

"Do you tax him with it?"

"It would be degrading."

"Be careful," I said. "There are breakers ahead."

"And so it's easy to break a woman!"

"You shan't be broken," I promised, gallantly. "We'll see this through together."

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Eustace was my next visitor. He dumped himself down in one of my armchairs. Soon he grew restless and began to pace the room.

"I've seen her again," he said.

"The devil you have!"

"I can't get her out of my head. It amounts to what those literary chaps call an obsession."

He was toying with a delicate piece of my cherished satsuma.

"Put that down," I said, "and settle yourself to a talk. Have a weed and look forward twenty years."

That sobered him.

"I suppose one must admit," he remarked, "that there is a good deal of the beast left in most of us."

"Yet you've a rare wife in Margaret."

"I'm not brute enough to deny it. Put that's just the point. She's a thousand times too good for me. I see the fact quite clearly."

"Speak on."

"A turn of the head did it."

"Your head must be easily turned."

"Don't I admit that? Hang it all, weakness is human!"

"So I learned from Dr. Kennedy's Principia."

"You don't help me out a bit."

"I was thinking of Margaret."

He colored up.

"Well," he said, slowly, turning as suddenly ashen, "you'll have time to think more about her. I'm hard hit. It's the old infatuation stronger than

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ever. There can only be one end to it. And I want you to break it to Margaret."

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I tried to reason with the man, but he tossed morality to the winds.

He begged me to stand between Margaret and a rough world. I warned him that I myself was not a stone, and he only smiled.

"The runaway game is played," I reminded him, "with a ball that rebounds."

But, though he took my meaning, he left me utterly perplexed.

"We are off to-morrow night. We catch the Dover boat, but we go southward. You can make up your mind to that, unless you hear to the contrary."

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I was glad there was a time to sleep over it. In the morning, that I might be prepared for emergencies, I bought two tickets for Paris. Then I sat down and awaited events. The day wore on, but there was no sign that Eustace had changed his mind.

I returned from my afternoon saunter to find Margaret herself at my bedside. She rose to greet me.

"How goes our romance?" I asked.

"Don't, Cousin Arthur! I've done with romance."

"The scamp leaves town to-night."

She shuddered.

"And not alone."

"Oh, Cousin Arthur; stop him, stop him!"

On the contrary, the best thing will be to let him go."

"You amaze me!"

"You might do worse than follow his example. Some injured wives would not hesitate."

She looked up bravely.

"If I bid you leave London with me, you must not hesitate."

How well she took it.

"It won't come to that, you know," I added. "But act as though it might. Pack a bag or so, and dine with me at 7 o'clock."

"If I thought—"

"Thought is dangerous in a crisis," I rejoined, "and may be fatal to a game."

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So far, so well. It was a heavy risk. At any moment during dinner I could have thrown discretion to the winds, but Margaret trusted me.

And here we are, without a hitch, at Charing Cross. Margaret was already ensconced in a snug compartment, and a friendly guard had locked her in.

It was now time to look for the runaway.

"You are quite safe if I leave you!" said I.

But she dared not trust herself to answer.

Her bag I had taken care to leave with a porter, so that for the moment I was quite unencumbered when, as I watched under the gloomy portico of the station, I saw, to my relief, the familiar face of the man I sought.

The woman was striking, bold; a radiant devil. What a contrast to Margaret! I could have cursed Eustace to his face.

But suavity was the right note, and I assumed it. Eustace, of course, frowned as I thrust my attentions upon him.

"Thought you'd like some one to see you off!"

"Very good of you," he said, mechanically.

"Look after your bag and things," I murmured, seizing the lady's dressing case. My porter was at hand. I handed it to him while her attention was distracted. "Put that in the cloakroom and bring me the ticket," I instructed him. He vanished.

Then I took them in hand. There was the usual flurry of departure all round us. I invented several new varieties of officiousness, which delayed them considerably. I insisted on registering the luggage for them. I got them to study the bookstall list while I mismanaged that bit of business, after which, having secured the ticket from the dressing bag from my porter, I felt equal to any emergency. I took Margaret's valise in my hand and faced them.

"There!" I said, triumphantly, "I think I have saved you some trouble!"

"Where's my dressing bag?" she asked.

"Isn't this it?" I demanded, blankly.

She almost shrieked with dismay.

But Eustace was looking at the initials. Margaret's initials.

I took advantage of his bewilderment.

"The contents of my case are priceless," said my lady, her eyes glittering.

"That ass of a porter," I cried.

"What's to be done?" she asked, looking at the clock.

"Hang on to this bag, Eustace, old chap," I said. "You've just time. A mistake—an exchange—these things often happen. Someone's got it among

their luggage on the train, depend upon it. Take this along and see if anyone claims it. I'll stay here."

I could see by the look in his eyes that his thoughts were straying to Margaret.

He took the bag and went off in the direction of the barrier.

I turned to her.

"It can never be replaced," she cried, wringing her hands.

"What if I undertake to replace it?"

"Oh," she cried, "impossible! What shall I do?"

"The Lost Property office?" I suggested.

"This place swarms with thieves."

"Shall we wire to Scotland Yard?"

We ran from bureau to bureau. Time was slipping away. I felt hap-

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pler. She gained the ear of the stationmaster at last and began to harangue him.

I said I would go and look for Eustace and return.

I found him.

He had reached the reserved carriage in due course. He had clamored for it to be opened.

It now wanted a minute to the hour. Margaret clung to him and would not let him go.

"Eustace, come with me! Come with me! You cannot have the heart!"

I peeped in, hearing her pleading voice. How could he resist her? I resolved to strengthen her appeal, though it choked me to hear her. As the guard passed I signaled to him. He turned the key once more.

In another minute the train steamed out of the station, and I breathed freely. They were ill equipped for their journey, but, luckily, as I reflected, the eloping angel has set up a big establishment in Paris.

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I discovered the flaming lady without difficulty.

"Your bag is found!" I told her joyfully.

"There has been a little mistake. I have thwarted a deliberate theft."

I handed her a little green case which contained three items.

It is no business of mine, of course, but I have reason to believe that, a few days later, she used those two tickets to Paris, in spite of the amazement with which she turned them over as I bowed and left her.

Since their return from that second and sweeter honeymoon, how often have Eustace and Margaret thanked me! Especially Margaret.

"It was a narrow shave," I am wont to reply. "The things that might have happened!"

"I must not hear about them, Cousin Arthur. No, not even in confidence."

—Sketch.

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Kaiser Not a Gaffer.

There is still one form of recreation open to Emperor William of Germany. He has never taken up golf. He often indulges privately in the innocuous and exhilarating ping-pong, but has never attempted the reckless and exciting chase after balls over a golf field.



"You are an old fogey, Cousin Arthur!"